

Married Life: A Perfect Yoga

(Translation of the Hindi Book “Grahastha Yoga~ Ek Siddha Yoga”
authored by Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya)

English Translation

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Preface

Association of man and woman has a very natural, important and useful purpose. This association has been going on from the creation of universe and shall go on till the end. In the normal course, this is willingly accepted by almost all adult men and women through the institution of marriage. However, in the recent past many distortions have gradually crept into the married life. As a result men and women do not find the desired satisfaction in each other's company in marriage now. Due to these distortions and dissatisfaction, people begin to find fault with the institution of marriage and often treat it as a burden or tend to violate its norm or break it. Many prefer keeping off from it because of fear of responsibilities or because of deluded religious conceptions.

Since the medieval times of cultural and social devolution a new line of thought began to be expressed everywhere by incompetent, self-centered and self-styled religious leaders. It was proclaimed that getting into the married life is a sign of weakness and inferiority, that households are doorways to hell, and that to don religious garbs renouncing all responsibilities of household is a road to heaven. This thought process began to be accepted everywhere in our country and as a result we see more than eight and half million men in religious garb moving around aimlessly.

This thought process is totally wrong. Assuredly, same spiritual progress can be attained while being in household or in *sannyās*. Married life is a very natural, simple and yet a perfect form of yoga. If all the regulations of married life are properly understood and dutifully followed, one can attain a very elevated spiritual state and earn one's right to heaven and enlightenment. This book expounds upon this very important concept. It is hoped that this book will be helpful in creating happiness, contentment and fulfillment in the married lives of the readers.

- *Shriram Sharma Acharya*

Importance of Family Life

The word yoga means 'to join' or 'to unite'. Every man in his natural, normal state is incomplete. To overcome this incompleteness he joins hands with another potent power to acquire strength and augment his potential, and then using this enhanced capability rapidly proceeds from the state of incompleteness to completeness: this is the sole purpose of yoga.

There are at least 84 famous branches of yoga like *Hath Yoga, Raj Yoga, Japa Yoga, Laya Yoa, Tantra Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jñāna Yoga, Karma Yoga, Swara Yoga, Riju Yoga, Mahā Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Samatva Yoga, Buddhi Yoga, Prāṇa Yoga, Dhyāna Yoga, Sāṅkhya Yoga, Jada Yoga, Surya Yoga, Chandra Yoga, Sahaja Yoga, Praṇav Yoga, Nitya Yoga* and so on, and another 700 not-so-popular sub-branches. The system, *sādhanā* techniques and practices of each of these are very different from the other, but even then, the guiding principle among them is the same. The means may be different but

the ultimate goal is the same. The progress made from smallness to greatness, from illusion to reality, darkness to light, incompleteness to completeness, from death to immortality is yoga. The attempt to transform the molecular soul into the Supreme Soul is yoga. Each and every path that attempts to achieve this is a yogic path.

To reach a place there could be different paths from different directions. Likewise there are several ways to self-realization too. When one is hungry one may choose to eat bread or rice or sweets or fruits or even meat, as per one's liking, to overcome hunger. All these food-items are very different in character from each other but eating any of them serves the same unique purpose namely, 'overcoming hunger'. Similarly, there is just one purpose behind all the yogic practices, 'expanding individual self' or in other words, 'uniting/linking smallness with greatness'.

Among all the streams of yoga, *Gṛahastha Yoga* (yoga of married life) is also one. If one gives a serious thought to it, one would realize that raising a family is indeed a very important, and yet relatively simple yoga. Even then the '*siddhis*' (spiritual accomplishments) attained through its practice are in no way inferior than any other yoga. In fact, they are superior. ¹*Gṛahastha Āshrama* fulfills the need of the other three *āshramas* and lends support to them. In other words, all the other three *āshramas* are meant only to properly organize *Gṛahastha āshrama* and make it peaceful and happy.

Youth, in *Brahmacharya āshrama* are asked to channelize their energies for self-improvement and observe abstinence only so that

¹ The Vedic Culture divides human life in four phases called *Āshramas* for harmonious management of individuals and the society with adequate opportunities of materialistic and spiritual growth.

their forthcoming *gṛahastha āshrama* is energetic and resourceful. Those who take up *vānprastha* and *sannyās* devote their energy to benefit others and try to bring peace and happiness to the world. But who are those 'others' and what is this 'world'? These are different names of *gṛahastha āshrama* only. On a weighing balance, all the three *āshramas* on one side would be balanced by the single *gṛahastha āshrama* on the other. If *gṛahastha āshrama* gets disorganized or destabilized, the other three *āshramas* would also not survive in this world.

Religious scriptures have prescribed that raising a family is a very important duty of every human being. It is written that the soul of a person who has no offspring has to go to hell and it cannot attain peace. It is also written that without giving birth to a child, one can never repay the debt of one's parents. There are several such beliefs prevalent in Indian culture. The real meaning behind them is just this: it is abiding to all to raise a family, help making good future of a child and contribute to the welfare of the society. This is worth pondering over. Why has so much importance been attached to the *gṛahastha āshrama*? When a serious analysis is done it can be understood that raising a family is indeed a divine yogic practice which helps in evolution of the self. It leads one to heaven, helps in breaking worldly ties and attaining realization.

Most of the revered *rishis* (Indian sages, scientists of spirituality) of yore were married and had their families. Rishi Vashishtha had one hundred sons, Anusuya was the wife of Rishi Atri, Rishi Gautam's wife was Ahalya, Parashuram was the son of Rishi Jamadagni, Sukanya was the wife of Rishi Chyavan, Rishi Yagyavalkya had two wives – Gargi and Maitreyi, Shringi was the son of Rishi Lomash. Though there were a few exceptions who had taken up *sannyāsa* at a

matured age, but almost all other *rishis* raised families and lived with them. They performed all their penance in *grahastha āshrama* and attained self-realization while being with their families. Lord Krishna, the supreme master of yoga raised a family and so did Lord Shiva, the presiding deity of yoga. In olden times it was commonplace to grow hair long, remain unclothed and sit on animal skin for *sādhana*. People had to live in small cottages in small villages. It is incorrect to say based upon these signs that these much-married *rishis* who were family men, had to leave their families to attain realization.

Creating and raising a happy family is in fact a very natural, important and available-to-all yogic path of self-development. Till a boy lives alone, his concept of self remains limited to just himself. He only thinks about feeding and clothing himself, and about his studies, his games and his own happiness. His entire work-field remains confined to just himself. When he marries his circumference of self expands. He begins to think about his wife's happiness and comfort. He begins to fulfill the needs of his wife while even compromising on his own comforts and wishes. He spends his energy to help and serve his wife, and make her happy. This just means that his conception of self now expands to two individuals from one. Then a baby arrives. The man now has to put so much selfless attention in serving the child's needs and his all-round development that he forgets about his personal needs and tries to meet all the child's requirements. Thus the circumference of his self expands from two to three. If father brings sweets home, he doesn't eat them but distributes them to his children. He accepts hardship but gives full attention to his children's health, education and happiness. Day-by-day he begins to establish control over his selfish ways, learns self-control and begins to regard wife, children

and relatives etc as his own self. This way indeed he progresses rapidly on the path of self-development.

Lord Manu has said, "A 'complete human being' is a man along with his wife and child." Till this does not happen he remains an incomplete, undeveloped man. Just as it is not possible to gain admission in a college without passing the entrance exam, so also without *grahastha āshrama* it is very difficult to get into the next stage *āshramas* like *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*. For most people, the domains of whom they regard as themselves, expand only gradually and sequentially.

Self expands from a single individual into two as husband-wife, then with a child into three and then into relatives and neighbours, into society, into village, region, state, nation and finally into the whole world. The entire humanity gradually begins to embrace one's sphere of own self. The progress that started from one to two in *grahastha āshrama* culminates into the realization that there is one's own soul that is spread in the whole world, one divine light of Supreme Soul that permeates the entire cosmos. With the arrival of wife man learns to control his selfishness, with children the self-control matures further and slowly man learns to master his selfishness completely. The practice of forgetting oneself for others gradually gets so evolved that nothing remains mine, everything becomes others'. Poetic renditions of 'I find nothing as mine, all belongs to Thee' begins to resonate in the heart. When 'I' dissolves, only 'Thou' remains. The basic and convenient practice of *Gṛahastha Yoga* in its perfectly evolved state results in the union of individual soul in the Supreme Soul. The bounded soul gets rid of its incompleteness, attains perfection and true purpose of yoga is met.

Need to Change the Attitude

We must understand that yoga means to merge our smallness and narrow-mindedness into attributes like greatness, large-heartedness and universal brotherhood. Yoga means to transmute selfishness into selflessness. Among the infinite yogic practices adopted for this purpose *Grahashta Yoga* is also one. This *sāadhanā* is comparatively more natural and convenient. So, some thinkers have called it *Sahaja Yoga* (or convenient yoga). Saint Kabir has extolled the virtues of this *sāadhanā* in several of his compositions.

Any object however ordinary it may be, when used properly and judiciously, can yield wonderful results. On the other hand a precious object when used improperly can cause a lot of harm. A very nutritious product like milk, when consumed inappropriately can cause extreme sickness and even death. On the other hand when a harmful substance like snake's poison is methodically refined it can turn into a very valuable life-saving drug. The same principle

applies to *grahastha āshrama* also. When actions are performed with the right attitude, the highest goal of self-realization can be attained within *grahastha āshrama* itself, as was proven by the great *rishis* and spiritual masters of yore.

These days most of the family men are found engulfed in unhappiness, sorrows, worries, tensions and ill-health. One must not assume that this is because they are raising families or that *grahastha āshrama* is responsible for this. These are because of their distorted way of thinking, impure thoughts and unrefined intrinsic tendencies. If mentality or thought process is polluted then such sorrows and problems would arise in every *āshrama*, in every society, and in every nation. It is wrong to blame *grahastha āshrama* for these. If this *āshrama* was actually so awful and deplorable, then all the great men and creators of new eras would have distanced themselves from the same. On the contrary in fact, we can see that almost all the greatness in this world has revolved around the centre of *grahastha āshrama*.

The best place to expand one's concept of self is one's own home. A street-artist learns his first lessons in acrobatics at his home. A small child learns to stand and tread his first steps at his home. Similarly yogic *sādhana*s must also be initiated at one's home. The confines of home are the best to bring in practice and expand the sentiments of love, sacrifice, devotion and service. Wherever the luminescence of these feelings fall that area of interaction begins to glow. Till the concept of self remains confined to just oneself, feelings like ill-will, anger, hatred and indifference persist towards others. When concepts of love and self expand to include others then even ordinary objects begin to appear beautiful. A mother considers her child to be a part of her own self. Even if she gets nothing in return

she loves her child dearly. To a devoted wife even a dark-skinned, ugly, ill-mannered husband appears handsome like Lord Indra and virtuous like Lord Brahaspati.

The root cause of all the conflicts in this world is that we give less but ask for a lot. We must learn to give a lot and ask for nothing or very little in return. Once we adopt this principle all the conflicts around us would ebb quickly. The one who undertakes the great *sāadhanā* of expansion of self has to change his attitude towards others. He has to learn to give, to sacrifice and to serve others. If we fill our inner heart with feelings of love and benevolence towards our near and dear ones, and adopt sacrifice and service in our behaviour, in a few moments we would see a magic unfold. A small family of ours which for a long time had been a house of conflict and unhappiness would turn into a heaven, with peace and happiness all around. Feelings of true love that originate from our heart get reflected back from our family members. And when they return they drench our parched, desiccated inner being with a pleasant, fragrant shower of happiness and turn it green again.

When a gardener takes the responsibility of a garden, he puts in his best efforts to maintain it and keep it green. A good householder must also learn to adopt a similar attitude. He must realize that Almighty has specially entrusted him with the responsibility of watering, providing fertilizers, maintaining and protecting these few plants in his garden. Though we have several duties towards our society and our nation, but the small garden of ours is an absolute and foremost responsibility. We must understand that it is our duty to keep every member of our family healthy, to provide them with proper education and good culture, and to make them wise and self-sufficient. We must consider this as God's directive and do our best

to fulfill this responsibility. Serving family members is in no way inferior to acts like benevolent service to society or worship of God even.

The seeds of selfishness or selflessness lie in our attitudes and thoughts. If we regard our wife as a servant, a possession, or an object for fulfilling our desires, and unthinkingly take her service and rule over her, then these feelings themselves would create conflicts, pain, sufferings and make the life hellish. On the other hand if she is regarded as a green, dense, shady tree of a beautiful garden on the sunny path of life, if the feelings towards her are of pure love, of service and sacrifice, and if her wishes are given priority over our own desires, then these feelings alone would turn married life into an abode of happiness, joy, love and heavenly beauty.

The principle 'give less and take more' is the root cause of conflict, sin, bitterness and creation of hell. The principle 'give more and ask for less' leads to love, cooperation, virtuousness and creation of heaven. If wife, son, father, brothers, uncles and aunts are looked at with a selfish eye to take their services, then all of them would seem selfish, indifferent, disobedient and full of bad qualities. It would seem that the entire household is an abode of sorrows, selfishness and sins. Several people blame their families this way, get discontented and then run away from their homes. In reality it is not the fault of the family but their attitude towards it. To the one who wears yellow glasses the whole world appears yellow. is not the fault of the family but their attitude towards it. To the one who wears yellow glasses the whole world appears yellow.

Every human being is incomplete. He/she is journeying from incompleteness towards completeness. So it is incorrect to expect

that all members of the family would be deities from heaven and be totally obedient. A soul brings along with it *samskāras* (intrinsic tendencies) accumulated since many, many previous births. These have to be refined very, very gradually with a lot of effort. They cannot be changed in a day. So it is inappropriate to expect our family members to obey us all the time. We must practice to get satisfied when we help them correct their mistakes, help them grow and make them happy. To expect to be happy only when all our wishes are met is to make an impossible demand on the world. It is a serious error to focus our happiness around the concept that family members and others would always follow what we say and would serve us. Those who make this error, to them all the joy and happiness of family life would probably be always denied.

Remember that raising a family is a kind of yoga *sādhana*. The prime qualities in personality that develop here are that of selflessness, service, love, cooperation, sacrifice, benevolence, and control over our expectations from others. Those who have adopted these qualities can be considered to be living in an elevated state of bliss. They are ascetics living in household.

Asceticism in Household

Several people can be heard pointing fingers at *gṛahastha āshrama* saying, “getting married and raising a family is getting entrapped in the shackles of *Māyā* (illusion, worldly attachment)”. To them family and household seem like being trapped inside web of problems and tensions and remaining unmarried seems like being in heaven. But after a careful consideration, this statement turns out to be quite frivolous and meaningless. This is because thraldoms of *māyā* are not cast through external objects or other human beings; they bind us through our own attitudes and thoughts. If mind is impure and filled with sensual desires, anger and greed, then whatever happens within household would also happen outside, say in *sannyās*. We have seen many so-called religious men who lived on alms throughout their lives and after their death a huge sum of money was recovered from their possession. We have seen several men who choose not to marry but are given to sensual desires;

who are mesmerized by the attractions of sound, taste, beauty, smell and touch and express lascivious interest in them; who have special attachment towards their hut, clothes, books, utensils, disciples and friends. These same tendencies can be found in householders in different forms.

The profound elements like absence of all desires and sacrifice are directly related to our mental feelings. If the feelings are parochial, polluted and self-centered, then even if a person lives in a sanctified place, his mental distortions will drive him to sin. If the feelings are pure and generous, then even in unsuitable and undesirable conditions, the person would reflect purity and virtuousness. Emerson, the renowned philosopher, used to say, "Send me to hell even and I would create a heaven there for myself." This is an exact truth, every person sees a reflection of his own self in the mirror that this world is. If his mind is engulfed in *māyā*, then he would see *māyā* everywhere, at home or outside, in jungle, in temple and in heaven even. If the mind is clean and there is purity, love and selflessness in sight, then every nook and corner of the house would look no less sanctified than a hermitage. There have been many great *rishis* like King Janak who did the *sāadhanā* of *grāhastha* yoga and attained the highest spiritual state.

Bravery is not in running away but in standing up and fighting. If *grāhastha āshrama* has more problems then it is not right to stay away from it out of fear. How can one learn to swim without entering in the pool of water? It would be prurient to say that I want to be a body-builder but won't go to gym. It is important to first observe bad qualities like sensual desires, anger, greed, and selfish

attachments, understand their workings, and then fight and win against them. *Gṛahastha āshrama* is the best stage to do this – so say numerous spiritual masters.

All the great *rishis* of yore have been born and brought up in this *āshrama*. Just imagine, if *gṛahastha āshrama*, which unintelligent people call names like *māyā* or worldly ties, wasn't there, then where would Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Mohammad and Gandhi come from? How would we ever learn of the great stories of devoted wives like Sita, Savitri, Anusuya, Madalasa, Damayanti, Parvati and so on? Where would the brilliant children like Dhruv, Prahlad, Nachiket and so on, whose names are the glittering jewels of spiritual world, appear from? It won't be an exaggeration to say that all the other three *āshramas* are kids, *gṛahastha* is their father. To call the father as worldly tie, hell or worth abandoning, is a sign of total indiscretion.

Till a person is loaded with responsibilities he does not become mature, sincere and responsible. Childish calves keep flitting and prancing around. When they are loaded with weight they begin to keep every step carefully forward. When an elephant treads through deep waters, it puts one foot ahead, carefully gauges the firmness of the ground underneath and then only puts the next foot forward. In doing this all his mental faculties get concentrated on each step.

Whatever Sage Patanjali has called concentration or the control of the agile tendencies and thought patterns of the mind (*chitta vritti nirodhah*) does not come about by just talking about them. A responsibility or an inspiration is required for this. When the weight of *gṛahastha āshrama* falls upon his shoulders, a person begins to take careful steps towards handling responsibilities. He leaves aside his careless ways. His responsible thinking and decision making, in

time, converts into wisdom and discretion. Just as a king has to tread carefully when managing the affairs of his kingdom, so also a common householder has to take steps forward with foresight, wisdom, patience, care and self-control. Just as a trainer trains an unruly horse with a whip and makes sure it becomes a perfect race horse, *grahastha āshrama* also with its several bitter and sweet experiences earns a man self-control, foresight, maturity and equipoise. All these are signs of yoga. A ripe fruit detaches itself from the branch on its own. Similarly a person attached to the branch of household gradually learns the concepts of selflessness and sacrifice, and finally turns into a yogi.

Attachment, greed, lasciviousness, obsession, indiscretion are qualities that one has to get rid of. These can exist in *grahastha āshrama* as well as in other *āshramas*. So *grahastha āshrama* is not to be renounced, instead, these bad qualities must be renounced.

Do Not Underestimate the Importance of Grahastha Yoga

Observance of abstinence is a very high quality and useful *sādhana*. It is beneficial both at physical and mental levels. The longer one can stay celibate the better. Normally boys must remain celibate till at least 21 years of age and girls till 18 years. Those who can control their minds for longer should remain celibate for longer.

Real Meaning of Abstinence

Abstinence is primarily establishing control over mind. If the mind meanders in fantasies and desires, and body is kept under forcible leash, then this can cause more harm than good. Compared to physical sexual act, mental lack-of-control and eroticism causes many times greater harm. Loss of seminal fluid gets easily replenished but if the stimulation that arises out of sensual thoughts is not relieved then it attacks with vengeance, just like a hurt snake does to anyone who disturbs it.

Famous psychoanalysts like Dr Freud and Dr Burne have opined that suppressed desires hide in the dark corners of the unconscious mind with a deep hurt. Whenever opportunity comes, they strike in the form of a dangerous mental or physical disease. Psychoanalysts say that several mental diseases like dementia, sudden loss of consciousness, epilepsy, obsession, sleep disorders, fear psychosis etc arise from improper suppression of desires. This is why the first requirement of abstinence is equipoise of mind. One whose mind is ever engrossed in the highest thoughts, and whose attention either does not divert towards sensuality, or even if it does it gets reverted out of disinterest or hatred, can be a true chaste. While for one, whose mind wanders behind sensual desires and who cannot control one's natural tendencies, physical abstinence is nothing but an irony.

If water is springing forth from a source, but the path of its flow is obstructed, then this water would accumulate and then gush out from elsewhere. Constant erotic thinking with external abstinence is a similar act. When desires arise in mind and lead to stimulation, this stimulation searches for a way to relieve itself. If the regular path is obstructed, it finds new ways, and these unnatural, new ways (outbreaks) are always dangerous and harmful.

An analysis of census reports from all over the world confirms this truth very clearly. Of the total number of deaths recorded per year, the proportion of widows and widowers is about one and a half times more than that of married women and men. By a superficial view it would seem that since married men and women spend off more of their vitality and life force compared to the unmarried ones, their life spans should be shorter. But the real facts are exactly opposite. Married people, despite loss of physical vitality due to repeated

sexual acts and bearing children, and despite carrying extra load of worries and responsibilities, live longer and stay healthier than unmarried people. The only reason for this is that mental cravings that originate from unfulfilled desires are very harmful and their poisonous flames keep evaporating the vital-energy internally. People who cannot marry also normally cannot accomplish much or become successful because of an unstable mind and lack of peace and contentment. So usually such people are more at a disadvantage than the married people.

Readers must not misunderstand the intent behind these lines. It is not being propounded here that married life is better than remaining celibate. Chastity is extremely important and accomplishing *sāadhanā*, its advantages are countless. But, the present context is focused at comparing mental lack-of-control with married life. Those who find themselves incapable of continuing *sāadhanā* of abstinence and cannot control their mental desires, for them it is appropriate to get married. This is what is true for 99 persons out of 100, and there is nothing wrong in following this natural process.

Spiritual Development in *Grahastha Āshrama*

It is not right to think that by getting tied in *grahastha āshrama* no spiritual development is possible. Any holy *sāadhanā* that elevates a soul to the Supreme Soul is actually related to the evolved state of the inner self (*antahkaraṇa*). External activities of life have very little to do with it. Just as a *brahmachāri* or one who has taken *vānprastha* or *sannyāsa* can attain the goal of life through *sāadhanā*, so can a householder. For time immemorial this has been going on. In fact, we can find more true spiritual *sādhaks* among family persons than otherwise. The *rishis* of older times were very different from today's

irresponsible and disorganized religious men. It was a common practice then to live in small cottages in open and away from dense cities, and to wear minimal clothes. Even kings and deities are depicted in pictures and sculptures as wearing clothes only below the waist. This was the norm in those times. What today's self-styled religious men wear and the life styles they adopt to make a show of their spirituality, were in fact commonplace social norms in earlier times.

We have already stated earlier that it is incorrect to say that all *rishis* of yore remained unmarried forever. Most of the *rishis* were married and their wives and children assisted them in their penance and spiritual development. A large number of instances can be found in the scriptures and the history in which spiritual men of then donned different roles like yogis, ascetics, researchers, orators, creators, philosophers, teachers and political leaders, and they would make their children and wives partners in their endeavours.

Some Prevalent Misconceptions

Those who take their first steps on spiritual path often get misled by some vague, incorrect statements like – “a householder cannot perform spiritual *sādhana*” or “woman is a gateway to hell” or “family and relations are ties of *māyā*”. Such statements often misguide and confuse young minds. As a result either they give up all spiritual endeavours as impossible for them while raising families, or give up their familial responsibilities and run away to even survive on alms. If one remains hung in between then the situation gets even worse. He begins to regard his family as a heavy load hung around his neck. He adopts attitudes of carelessness, indifference and irresponsibility towards his family and so his behaviour towards his family turns bitter and ugly. His wife and children begin to feel that

this man is making our lives miserable. Feelings of enmity and revenge arise and an ambience of bitterness, conflict and hatred gets created. And in such an environment no living being can remain healthy and happy. So it is absolutely necessary to reject all misgivings about *grahastha āshrama* and understand that following *grahastha āshrama* is a very capable *sāadhanā* that can yield great results.

Grahastha āshrama is a long spiritual endeavour of life; it is holy, important and very meaningful. When husband and wife come together two incomplete lives combine to take form of a complete life. Like two wings of a bird or two wheels of a chariot, meeting of man and woman creates a strong and stable system. Experts of human physiology and psychology know that both men and women have their own strengths and weaknesses. They complement each other's strengths by coming together. The natural attraction between the two sexes originates from the desire to draw strengths from each other. The subtle consciousness of mind is forever in search of resources that can help it overcome its weaknesses. This in common terms, is called the strong desire of harmonious union. A blind and a lame can complement each other's strengths and get the benefit of seeing and walking. Similar benefits couples earn too by helping each other.

The Glory of Women

Basically neither man is bad nor woman. Both are holy creations of the Almighty. Sublime luminescence of soul shines within both. Man's workplace is usually outside the house and so his external qualities get developed. His personality develops into that of a strong, influential and clever breadwinner. But in his persistent struggle with the external world he loses several virtues and good

qualities of the soul to a large extent. The qualities and emotions like simplicity, liveliness, honesty, sacrifice, compassion, love and affection can even today be found several times more in women than men. Though because for a long period women have been confined to a small cage called home, and denied education, exposure and experience of the external society, and because their circle of interaction has always remained other equally naïve women, they now lag far behind men in worldly, practical knowledge. But even then they possess basic good qualities and nobility many times more than men. There is no possibility of spiritual decline, or of attaining hell or getting shackled by *māyā* in associating with them. In fact, if man accepts to stay in woman's sanctified shade, he can rid himself of several of his devilish tendencies. Her love and grace is like a pious river, one sip of which can cleanse all the sins and sufferings of man.

They whose mind is pure and hearts are sensitive can experience an uninterrupted flow of *sātwic* elements emanating from women. Prophet Mohammad used to say, “My heaven lies beneath the feet of my mother.” Saint William has said, “In woman's eyes God has provided two lamps, so that men who have lost their way can in their light, find it again.” Saint Powell once said, “I don't consider woman as important because Creator has made her beautiful, nor do I love her because she is made to be loved. I only consider her worthy to be worshipped because only within her all the humanity of humans is alive.” Soothsayer Taylor once published the following thought, “Godly luminescence creates a woman. She is a river of sweetness where man gets relief from all his worries and sorrows.” Plato, the philosopher said, “When the universe came into existence, man was lame and lay sobbing in a corner of the earth. Woman lifted him and brought him up affectionately. Today the same ungrateful man treats her as if she is worthless and contemptible.” Poet Hargrutch

said, “Women are poems of this terrestrial world. The salvation of future of humanity lies in her hands alone.” Carlisle used to say, “If you want to see love personified, look into the deeply emotional eyes of a mother.” Saint Caldwell used to say, “Till Adam was alone he found heaven as a bed of thorns. Songs of angels, cool breeze, beautiful gardens were all meaningless to him. Despite all the pleasures of paradise he was very unhappy there and sighed all the time. When he met Eve all his sorrows disappeared, all the thorns transformed into flowers.”

The saints who have seen woman with purity in their eyes, have found God's living poem personified in her. Those whose sight is impure, for them the danger lies not only in being close to their mothers, daughters and sisters but to this entire living and non-living creation of God. If one's clothes are on fire then there always is a grave threat of vicious fire mishap around him. While for one who has sunglasses on, the scorching sunshine also appears cool. Dear readers, try to make your attitude pure and pious. Rest assured even you can become a great saint while being a householder just like King Janak.

Some Mantras of Grahastha Yoga

Sin and virtues depend not upon the external manifestation of deeds but upon the sentiments and intent behind the same. Selfishness and selflessness, righteousness and evilness do not depend upon what the overt actions are but upon the attitude that lead to those actions. The gross, superficial intelligence of human kind judges a person good or bad based upon his actions. But in the divine court the external form of actions does not count; only the spirit behind the actions are valued there. The quality of emotions depends upon one's internal purity. Cheating and ostentations can fool the external world, but not the inner soul ever. The inner being knows very well the exact intent behind every action. There is no way to cheat or mislead the soul whatever is true gets imprinted upon the clean slate of the inner self. Only those actions that inspire the sentiments of sacrifice, service, love, and goodwill in the inner being can be termed as true and perfectly selfless actions. Such actions are definite

steps towards self-realization, irrespective of whether their external form was ordinary or extraordinary, normal or unusual, simple or grand.

There are two attitudes to raise the family: One is of false pride, selfishness and imposing authority upon family; and the second of sacrifice, love, service and benevolence. The first attitude leads to bindings, sin and spiritual decline. The second attitude leads to freedom, virtues and spiritual elevation. The family life that spiritual masters and saints have denigrated, called worldly ties, and asked to forsake, is actually related to the selfish attitude of raising families. Raising a family with selfless attitude is, on the contrary, a spiritual *sādhana* of the highest order. Such a *grahastha āshrama* has always been adopted by almost every *rishi*, yogi, spiritual master and deity, and has consolidated his/her path to spiritual heights. By adopting this path they never had to get shackled to worldly ties nor had to go to hell. If *grahastha āshrama* was meant to shackle and was so hellish, where would so many well know virtuous children get born? Why would the best yogis ever adopt this path?

Definitely *Grahastha Yoga* is an all-encompassing spiritual *sādhana* that is holy and leads to development of self. A family person must never think that he/she is leading a spiritually inferior life in any way.

Basically there is not much difference between and married and unmarried lives. The choice depends upon one's convenience, interest and work style. Those who have a lot of touring to do need not take up the additional responsibility of a wife and children. While those who have a relatively stable life with less requirements for traveling can conveniently adopt a married life. Both lives are

spiritually identical. When attitude is pure and selfless, the development of self would happen quickly in both lives.

Mantra 1: Fundamental Tenets of *Gṛahastha Yoga*

The ultimate objective of life is to make the individual soul meet the Supreme Soul. To carry out actions for the good of all while forsaking individual selfish desires is the real spiritual endeavour (*sādhana*). There could be several different ways to adopt this *sādhana* in practical lives. *Gṛahastha Yoga* is one such. A child learns several primary activities at home. More than half of the skills that are needed in life are also learnt at home. Our *sādhana* of inner-refinement must also begin at home. The best laboratory to train life to attain greatness, self-control and selflessness, and to become cultured and service-oriented is home itself. It becomes very convenient to do all this at home because in family-life there is natural love, responsibility, duty, mutual dependence and cooperation. Home is a stable place and is secure from the prying eyes of strangers.

A *sādhak* of *Gṛahastha Yoga* must always contemplate in the following way:

- My family is my hermitage – the most holy place for my *sādhana*.
- The rituals prescribed to me are – devote my energies and best efforts always to develop my home like a beautiful, fragrant, fertile garden.
- My devotion to God is to fulfill the responsibility entrusted upon me by God for watering, and maintaining this garden and help it flourish.
- My self-control is that I do not consider any member of my family small and unworthy of deserving of my service, and I do

not take undue pride in being the owner, master, leader or the breadwinner of my family.

- My benevolence and selflessness is in devoting my service to the upbringing and personality development of each member of my family.
- My self-surrender is to serve others with absolutely pure feeling of dutifulness, without expecting anything in return.
- My penance is to provide happiness and comforts to my family members even at the expense of my personal happiness and comfort.
- My *yagya* (religious deed) is to enhance peace and happiness in this world by making each and every member of my family a refined, truthful, honest and responsible individual.
- My religious vow is to make my conduct and behaviour so pure and idealistic that it would inspire everyone silently to follow me and become virtuous.
- My self-restraint is to raise my family within the rightfully earned means of income.
- My *ārāadhanā* (prime service to society) is to be always filled with love, benevolence and compassion, and to enhance happiness, joy and unity in the family and neighborhood.
- My worship is to have complete devotion towards living idols of God in the temple of my home and to adorn them with ornaments of good virtues, good nature and good conduct.
- My *sāadhanā* is true, my feelings towards my *sāadhanā* are genuine and sincere, and my soul knows that I am truthful.
- Like a true unattached *karmayogi* I draw my happiness and satisfaction from the sincere efforts I put into my *sāadhanā* without worrying about their success or failure.
- I have taken an oath to be truthful and righteous, and I would forever try to uphold it with all sincerity.

Every *Gṛahastha Yogi* should adopt these mantras whole-heartedly. He must chant them several times during the day. He may write these on a small card and carry it along and he should read them whenever he gets time, contemplating upon each written word. If possible he should frame it in a poster and hang it upon a wall in his room. Early in the morning while getting up from sleep he must read these mantras a few times before getting busy in the chores, and take a vow that he would try his best throughout the day to do all the activities in perfect accordance with the deep sentiments hidden in these words and that he would try carefully and sincerely to match his conduct with these thoughts. For one who leaves his bed contemplating upon these mantras, the effect of these mantras stays with him throughout the day. The instructions given to the inner unconscious mind early in the morning go very deep; they do not fade in the memory easily and recur in the conscious mind at the right time.

Mantra 2: The Oath of Firmness

Every morning a *Gṛahastha Yogi* must chant –

- I am a *Gṛahastha Yogi*
- My life is oriented towards *sāadhanā*
- What do others do, how they do it, what do they say and think – I do not care, for I am satisfied with myself
- My true *sāadhanā* of performing my duties is so great, so satisfying, calming and fulfilling that it suffuses my soul with bliss
- I shall continue my enriching, blissful *sāadhanā* uninterruptedly
- I shall always perform all my duties towards my home with selfless attitude.

This oath must get firmly ingrained in mind. Whenever mind begins to waver and infirmities appear to set in, this oath must be consolidated again with sincerity.

Before falling asleep in the night all the actions during the day shall be thought over again:

- What all activities did I do today that were related to my family?
- What were my errors in carrying these out?
- What inappropriate actions did I perform out of selfishness?
- What all wrong did I do unintentionally?
- Which all actions were good, appropriate and in perfect accordance to the regulations of *Grahastha Yoga*?

All the activities done for the family must be divided into these categories and then ideas to correct the errors made must be found out. (i) Searching for mistakes and errors, (ii) accepting them, (iii) being ashamed of them, and (iv) putting sincere, honest efforts to correct them – whoever likes this process and adopts it in his life, his mistakes reduce day-by-day and soon he rids himself off all his weaknesses.

Mantra 3: The Oath to Fight All Shortcomings and Faults

On the path of *sāadhanā* of *Grahastha Yoga*, a *sādhak* is faced with a number of new problems every day. Sometimes due to his errors and at other times due to others', incidents keep unfolding that are not in consonance with the tenets of *Grahastha Yoga*. A *sādhak* wishes that each of his action should be perfect and according to the principles, but mistakes keep recurring. *Sādhak* believes that in a few days, in a few weeks, or a few months all his faults would be rectified and his

actions would become perfect. But when a long time passes by and the errors do not subside, then his mind begins to worry and feelings of disappointment and failure begin to creep in. He thinks: I am trying so hard and yet am unable to win over my nature. I err daily and my *sāadhanā* is not progressing properly. Sometimes he thinks: my family members are silly, idiotic and irresponsible. They trouble me and annoy me; they do not allow me to tread on the path of *sāadhanā*. So it is not worth continuing my *sāadhanā* anymore. Egged on by such disappointing thoughts he gives up on his oath.

Every *sādhak* must take precautions against this difficulty. It is certainly true that human nature has its own fallacies and shortcomings. The day a human overcomes all his shortcomings he would attain the supreme spiritual state, and become free. Till he has not arrived at his destination, he has to remain in human form with all its known shortcomings. When there is a mix of several individuals, in which some are in an advanced spiritual state and some are lagging behind, it is but natural that new errors and mistakes would surface everyday. Some of these would be committed by us, some by others. The frequency of occurrence of these errors would reduce gradually, but it is impossible to believe that our family would transform into a family of deities. So neither there is any need to be afraid of difficulties nor to get worried and perturbed. After all *sāadhanā* stands for 'the practice to correct errors' and this practice must go on unhindered.

Yogis practice their *sāadhanās* like *Prāṇāyāma*, self-control and meditation every day because their mental makeup still has some shortcomings. The moment these are removed, they also would attain self-realization. Being devoid of all faults is a sign of reaching the pinnacle, the final destination. *Sādhaks* should not even expect

that all the desired feelings would come into action with a short practice of *sāadhanā*. Thoughts can come to mind in a flash but for them to get fully ingrained as an intrinsic tendency is a long, laborious process. To make an impression upon a stone the rope has to rub against it for a long, long time. One must understand that absolute freedom from all faults is the final aim; it is the final state of evolution of a being. It is not a sign of the first stage of *sāadhanā*. If one begins to search for mangoes amongst leaves of a newly grown plant, he has to return disappointed.

Rather than expecting total perfection, one must observe whether there is at least some increase in *sātwic* (pure, serene) qualities or not. If there is even a little bit of progress it is a sign of hope, joy and success. A drop on drop fills the whole pot, a grain on grain becomes a quintal. If there is a little bit of success daily, then in the countless days of life, huge success will aggrandize. And this wealth does not get destroyed ever. This accumulation continues life after life and we would certainly reach us to our final destination definitely at the end. If success is being attained little-by-little, one must keep going with renewed enthusiasm. There is no need to feel disappointed and give up.

When one comes face to face with personal shortcomings during self-introspection, one must not feel disappointed. One must strengthen these feelings –

- Like a brave soldier I am fighting in this battle that would continue my entire lifetime.
- All the bad *samskāras* my family members and I have acquired over millions of previous births, keep presenting obstacles in my

path. Sometimes I err, sometimes they. Obstacles keep coming, but I would not let them perturb me.

- I would fight all the difficulties I am faced with. When I trip and fall, I would not give up, and become quiet and accept defeat. I would get up again, ward off the dust and fight again. Only the one who fights, falls and hurts himself.
- Even when my own bad tendencies make me fall I would continue my fight.
- I am walking the path of truth. I am a blissful soul and it is my duty to fight my and others' ill-tendencies and not stop till I win over them.
- I am true to my oath, my intent, my *sāadhanā* and my ultimate goal.
- I shall protect my righteousness and win against all the difficulties.
- I shall continue to search, identify and weed out all my faults always with the same fervor I started out with.

This above mantra must be always contemplated upon along with measuring of success attained. This prevents one from getting demoralized. The above three great mantras: the fundamental tenets of *Gṛahastha Yoga*, the oath of firmness, and the oath to fight the holy war against faults and shortcomings must always resound loudly in the core of a *sādhak*'s mind. These thoughts should be imbibed in his mind and keep inspiring him most of the time. This will not only edify his personal and family life but also contribute to development of better society.

Peace and Happiness in Family

A householder driven by a selfish mind has been called by wise men to be entrapped in the clutches of *māyā*. “I am the head of the family. Every member of my family must obey my orders, act as per my wishes and liking, follow my instructions all the time and must willingly live as I wish to keep them” – to one who takes up family life with such expectations and desires, his household would assuredly appear nothing but a hell that is full of sorrows, miseries, bindings and disillusionments. It is simply impossible that everyone would become as we want one to be. Every human being is different from all others in terms of qualities, conduct and nature. A person's nature is in fact a conglomeration of intrinsic qualities acquired over many, many previous births. One's personality can definitely be refined with efforts, but it is not possible that the person would completely surrender his individuality. Everybody has different interests, likings,

instincts, feelings, and disposition. No individual would, like an idol of clay, accept every order, and think, speak and do exactly as per other's wish. Some difference of opinions would always exist. A person cannot completely give up all his self-centered interests. Whenever our commands would go against a person's likings or inner motives, he would try to make excuses and avoid following them. Alternately, if our demands far exceed the capability of family members then none would come forward to meet them. This would ensue dissatisfaction, ill-will, anger, and conflicts between us and others in the family, leading to a great disharmony. The household would be filled with agony and sufferings.

To prevent such agonizing situations from arising, we need to learn to compromise and accommodate. Rather than being too rigid about our demands and trying to impose our thoughts upon others, we need to be a little soft and accommodating. We must learn to make compromises with others as much as possible, surely up to the extent that no harm is caused and no wrong is done. True that it is our duty to ensure that members of our family adopt righteous ways, but it is also true that to make anyone follow our each and every command faithfully in a short time is also very, very difficult. Things get done when we bend a little. Flexibility and compromises often do wonders. Master trainers at a circus know how much leniency and strictness, and how much time and effort is required to tame uncouth, wild animals and to make them perform great tricks. Too much strictness and too much leniency both are not right. To walk the middle path and to move ahead adopting generosity and forbearance is the most advantageous approach. Happiness and peace can be maintained in the family on this basis.

Importance of Self-Sacrifice

The proper method to create peace, satisfaction and order in family is to adopt the principle of self-sacrifice in personal conduct. We must present ourselves as an example. This would inspire other family members to also adopt self-sacrifice in their conduct. As much importance we give to the principle of 'less to me, more to others', to that extent peace, harmony and orderliness is attained. A *Grahashta Yogi* must present himself to others as a selfless, impartial, well-meaning attendant of the family. We must not let the thoughts like, 'what benefit do I derive from my family' and 'do my family members value my self-sacrifice or not', ever enter our minds. Instead we should be concerned about whether or not are we like an honest gardener, trying our best to develop our garden. We must always search for answers to the following questions. Am I ever holding back some of my efforts towards my family? Is there any decline in my selflessness and impartiality? Am I being lethargic, or am I procrastinating in fulfilling my duties? If the answers to these questions are negative then it is a matter of great joy and accomplishment. The positive or negative answers to other questions like, whether anyone appreciates me or not, whether anyone feels indebted to me or not, and whether success has been achieved or not, lie with others. To keep an account of answers to such questions is demeaning our *sāadhanā*. A *sādhak* must never let his happiness depend on others. To feel happy only when others appreciate us is a state of bankruptcy. We must try to locate the source of happiness within our soul itself. There is nothing in this world that can give more happiness than the fact that we have earnestly fulfilled all our duties.

The Greatest Act of Service

What is the sign of true benevolence? True benevolence is an act that enhances peace and happiness in the world. The basic intent behind all benevolent deeds like construction of roadside drinking water centers, accommodations for travelers, wells, water reservoirs, gardens, roads, schools, dispensaries etc is also that these would reduce discomfort of others and enhance happiness. Several organizations are created and managed for this purpose alone. Similarly, *sāadhanā* of various great souls, ascetics, patriots, public servants, benevolent individuals etc. is also carried out for the same purpose. Even scriptures say that true religion and love for God lies in doing activities that further peace and happiness in the world.

There are many different ways of doing benevolent deeds. Among them, a very important way is enhancing *sātwic* qualities in man, and it is the best. It is many times more virtuous to make someone's thoughts pure and actions superior, than donating him food, water, clothes etc. This is so because once a person gets the righteous direction and inculcates virtuous qualities then just like a fragrant flower, he lifelong provides peace and comfort to those who come in his contact. A righteous man is like a munificent being who distributes food for soul in **large quantities** to the needy, and thereby truly supports and uplifts the lives of many more. **Sure enough, producing a virtuous man can give much more returns than constructing ten thousand water reservoirs.** If we can enrich our families with good sentiments and righteous attitudes, then *sātwic* qualities will enhance in their nature and character, and that would then guide many, many more who come in their contact.

Seeds of a single tree produce several new plants. These in turn produce many more seeds and many more trees. The sequence grows

from one to ten, ten to hundred, hundred to thousand, and keeps growing forever. Similarly, if we can produce even four persons (in our family, say) of righteous character, they would in turn cast their influence upon thousands of others, directly or indirectly. Some among them may turn out to be the likes of Harishchandra, Shivi, Dadhichi, Shivaji and Rana Pratap, whose 'body of glory' lives on even after their physical death, and then this body of glory of theirs for thousands of years keeps inspiring *sātwic* qualities in mankind. To create a man who is great and full of *sātwic* qualities is such a profoundly benevolent deed that it has no comparison with any construction of bricks and cement or any worldly contribution to mankind.

Scriptures say that Guru has to share one-tenths of the sins or virtues of his disciples. When students of a class fail, the reputation of the teacher of the class also goes down, while, if the students pass with good marks, the teacher also gets promotion. This is so because in the failure or success of students, the efforts of the teacher also get counted. Thus students' failure or success brings disrepute or appreciation for the teacher too. In the same way if family members become righteous or unrighteous, the head of the family also has to share the virtues or sins that they accrue. If we manage to make our family members righteous and truthful by our efforts, good-will and sacrifice, then this high quality deed of ours would not be inferior to any other benevolent deed in the world. If everyone undertakes to reform one's family, it would take no time to reform the entire world. If everyone sincerely fulfills the responsibility of his field, heaven would descend upon the earth in no time.

We must keep examining very carefully the following. Is every man, woman, or child in the family getting sufficient opportunity for the

growth of their physical and mental faculties? Is anyone being denied his/her natural right to grow in life and create a bright future? Is anyone getting undue luxuries and pampering and is anyone else being unfairly pressurized and oppressed? When observed minutely, answers to these three questions can clearly point to where there is a need to improve the organization of the family. It has become quite a common practice these days to pamper boys more than girls, men folk more than womenfolk, and those who earn more than those who earn less or do not earn. These people are always ahead when it comes to choice of food or clothes, for entertainment and for receiving adulation and respect. Unfortunately, women and girls at home are normally considered worthless by our prejudiced society and very little attention is paid towards their needs, conveniences, and growth. This injustice must be removed with our efforts. Needs of all must be met with, whether they are girls, womenfolk, non-earning members, sick, old or disabled.

Happiness in Limited Means of Income

It is incorrect to worry about how can the requirements of all people in the family be met when the income is less. If income is less then it is necessary to make the lifestyle simple and frugal. If coarse cloth and less expensive food grains are used, way-of-life is kept simple, and undesirable items of show-off and fashion are voluntarily and happily renounced, then all can live happily in limited resources. There is no wisdom in copying rich, extravagant, fashionable and ostentatious people. Simplicity is a divine quality. The time that is wasted on useless acts can be used to keep home, clothes and body clean and tidy. If unfair partiality exists then ill-will, jealousy and infighting would spring even in wealthy households. On the other hand, if impartiality, evenness, self-sacrifice and cooperation exist then love and satisfaction would be present even in poverty.

This world has many rich people who live luxurious lives, who show-off their wealth and indulge in sensual pleasures. There is no need to copy their luxurious, extravagant life styles. Instead we must try to copy their sharp intellect, smartness, hard work, if any, and alacrity. We must learn to look at the qualities that have earned them this grandeur. We must never adopt their polluted thinking and faults like ostentation and display of wealth. Simplicity and poverty are no hindrances to maintain peace and happiness in family life.

The First Requirement for Happiness: Good Health

All in the family must get uniform opportunities towards good health, education, entertainment and building a bright future. We must keep on looking: is anyone being physically or mentally pressurized which is affecting one's good health? Is anyone moving towards ill-health due to uncontrolled, unrestrained way-of-life? There is no need to worry if lavish, good quality and much-advertised food is not available for the family and we need to make do with less-expensive, ordinary food. Such food would never spoil anyone's health. Health actually gets spoilt due to disorganized way-of-life. Any kind of expensive, exotic food cannot mitigate the harm caused by improper life-style. If we pay full attention towards sufficient food, sound sleep, and regular exercise, excretion, bathing, cleanliness, abstinence and physical labour etc then we can easily keep ourselves from falling ill. If ever someone in the family does fall sick, and the disease is not serious in nature, then there is no need to panic, run after famous doctors and empty our pockets in paying their enormous fees and purchasing expensive imported medicines. We can fight with the ailment by taking advice of some experienced, noble person, and using simple basic medicines and helping the patient follow necessary health-disciplines. Consuming highly

potent and poisonous medicines gives a quick relief from symptoms of disease at that time, but creates many imbalances and troubles later on. It is prudent to fight common ailments by fasting, eating fresh fruits and mild vegetable-soups, and taking simplistic medical treatment.

The Second Requirement: Good Education

Just as food is necessary to overcome hunger, education is necessary to nurture the mind. Every member of the family must be provided good education. Those who can go to school must get educated at school, while those who cannot, must study at home. Children, young and elderly people, all must develop liking for reading, and we must conserve resources to provide books for all. A school-at-home must operate daily for 1-2 hours. When all the family members have been made literate, they must be provided thoughtfully chosen books that help them in furthering knowledge about topics like human body, mind, social issues, religion and so on. All must be able to understand the problems of life, should be able to analyze deeply, and should be able to read opinions of genuine and sagacious thinkers on these issues.

It is good to read religious texts like Ramayana, but one must not confine oneself to reading only mythological and historical accounts. To be able to understand and solve day-to-day problems and struggles of life is also very important. This also is a practice of religion only. One must increase one's linguistic knowledge by learning script and grammar, and enhance vocabulary through dictionaries. At the same time through methods like debates, questioning, reasoning, listening to discourses on important topics, one should enhance one's information, intelligence and analytical capability. Every one in the family must be given an equal

opportunity to further one's education and knowledge just like we provide food for everyone.

The Third Requirement: Healthy Entertainment

After health and education, the next aspect is that of entertainment. This is also very important. If man does not get an opportunity to enjoy, to laugh, play and amuse himself, then his mental state would turn acrid, irritable, intolerant and pessimistic. Those who work day in and day out like slaves, those who keep doing the same work over and over like prisoners, and those whose lives revolve only around the three activities of eating, toiling at work and sleeping, the liveliness and freshness of their beings slowly begins to dry up from inside and outside. They become unkind, hostile, bad tempered, unfaithful, fearful and cowardly. Such people become very suspecting and remain dissatisfied with the world. Because of this attitude their physical and mental health begins to deteriorate and they begin to age and turn old very early.

A plant for its development needs fertile soil, and water. But it also needs fresh air and sunlight. Similarly those who provide for health and education of their family and not for their entertainment, do an incomplete job (duty). Prudent men have said – one who keeps off from music, literature and art is an animal without tail and horns. This statement is meant to criticize a life that is dry, uninteresting and devoid of entertainment. Surely, entertainment is a necessary nutrition without which life begins to wither. But, one must always try to save oneself from entertainment that gives only sensual pleasure, is unhealthy, in bad taste and vulgar. One must search for simple, pure and decent means to amuse oneself. Through soothing music, singing, playing instruments, traveling, meeting people, dining with friends and acquaintances, visiting fairs and carnivals,

participating in competitions, learning arts and crafts, attending public speeches, visiting exhibitions and museums, playing sports and many such similar ways we can occupy ourselves in healthy entertainment. Men of the family keep getting such opportunities but womenfolk and children are often denied of these. This is not fair. They also must get such opportunities **as and when possible**. Small children must get **many** toys to play with. If some money gets spent for recreating merriment and enjoyment then one must not hold oneself back, because whatever money is judiciously spent on these activities is not wasted but ends up fulfilling a very important and basic necessity.

The Fourth Requirement: Opportunity to Grow

The fourth important need is opportunity to build a bright future. We must never get satisfied if the needs of everyone in the family is being somehow met today. Instead, we must plan as to how the future of each and every member of our family can become bright, happy, prosperous and inspirational to others. The aim of a being behind taking this physical form, is not to somehow pass days, but to elevate its state, move ahead and progress continuously **by garnering resources**. It is necessary to always think of ways and to continuously put in efforts to refine and elevate ours as well as others' lives higher, **and even higher**. We must continuously work on plans that help in the development of both internal and external aspects of life. It is our prime duty to always try and garner all the resources that are needed for the progress in the future. Till sufficient education, qualifications, and experience is attained to solve physical, mental, economic and social problems, life cannot become happy. So every one must be given an opportunity to acquire essential skills like ability to read and write, to earn one's living, to remain healthy and fight diseases, to converse and mix socially, and to interact and

exchange thoughtful views with others. It is very necessary to make everyone capable of earning one's own living because sometimes such unfortunate situations may arise in life when one may lose one's possessions, property or those who are near and dear. In such circumstances only that person can win who has already prepared himself well to fight adversities.

We must look carefully within our home and find out if there is anyone whose any of the above four requirements are not being met properly met. If there is someone like that, we must try our level best to arrange for fulfilling these requirements. If we manage to make even **ten lives** of our family happy and contented to some extent, we can believe that through our act there was an enhancement of welfare in the world, that we did a great benevolent service and helped spread our religion (of humanity and wisdom), and that we earned virtues for ourselves. If our attempts were not explicitly successful, even then we stand benefited, because all our good thoughts and intentions keep working in our brain and are then inscribed in our inner (unconscious) mind as auspicious tendencies. These auspicious tendencies silently blossom and bring happiness and prosperity in many ways in this life and beyond.

Some Guidelines for the Entire Family

Importance of a happy family life cannot be stressed enough. By following some simple guidelines members of a family can transform the environment of their entire household into a heavenly one. These guidelines are suitable in modern small families too – especially with regards to interaction with grand parents, near relations, and among the spouses who often tend to treat marriage like a social contract and give priority to their professional interests over the family.

Avoid Misunderstandings

The main reason for increase in strife in families is 'unwarranted reservation'. We usually mix very well and converse openly with outsiders, but remain reserved with our family members and talk to them very little. Few families can be found nowadays in which members talk to each other candidly about what is there in their minds. The essential reasons for encouraging conduct like respect and regard for elders of family, and decency, modesty, tolerance, etc

have been forgotten, and highly distorted forms of customs now prevail in the families, due to which members hesitate to express their feelings and experiences, and their needs in front of other members. The result of this uncommunicativeness is that people begin to fail to understand each other. Any expression of difference of opinion begins to be looked upon as disobedience, disregard or opposition. This is very wrong.

Self-Governance in Families

If a decision has to be taken in the family, opinion of all men and women who are mature enough to have opinions, must be taken. All must be given a chance to express what they want and what they lack. If we want some decision to be taken our way, we must present its case with substantial (or justifying) preamble, logical arguments and supporting examples, so that all members find it agreeable. Everyone at home must feel that a work was done because he/she desired so. Just as it is necessary to take agreement of people while governing a democratic country, in the same way it is necessary to respect the views and suggestions of family members for running a family. When family members agree to the management of the family, peace and happiness would prevail. When a country is governed through political self-governance, there is a lot of peace and progress. The same is true when there is self-governance in the family too. Members of a family should not feel that someone's dictate is being enforced upon them. Instead, they should feel that whatever policies are adopted are for everyone's welfare, are formulated with discretion and after taking everyone's opinion into account, and that the family is being managed aptly with affection and care. Whichever family adopts these simple and natural principles remains happy and contented.

Suggestions for Women in Family

We often see clashes over trivial matters between mothers and daughters-in-law, younger and elder daughters-in-law and between women of various other relations within the family. It's a common observation in the Indian society that women get very little opportunity towards expansion of knowledge and outlook. So they tend to be a little less generous towards other people. Though undoubtedly women are way ahead of men in terms of their ability to love and sacrifice, but often these feelings get totally limited to their own husbands and children. Not much of these are then left for others in the family and outside. We must try to explain and make women in the family understand, by demonstrating our own generosity towards all, that all members of the family are our very own and very dear to us. We must try to mold their mind-set so that it begins to reject all ill-feelings towards other family members; we must help them broaden their attitude so that they would begin to regard all family-members as their very own.

All the work at home should be evenly distributed among all. If someone is ill or weak or pregnant then her work should be taken up by others in the family willingly to reduce the burden on the individual. Leaving alone the jewelry of daily use, all the other expensive jewelry should be pooled and kept together by the women in the family, so that whosoever needs can use any jewelry of her liking. If the home is prosperous enough, then jewelry can be made for all individually, but care must be taken that none gets more than others. It is quite common that a newly wed bride would have more possessions initially than others. **For the initial years they must be allowed to have them till they find themselves comfortable and become one with the family.** Except for any special circumstances, all in the family must eat same food, and wear clothes and hold all

possessions uniformly. This way unity can be maintained within the women of the family.

Understanding Among Family Members

Elders of the family must not demand excessive courtesy from the younger generation. They must treat them with generosity, love, sympathy and forgiveness, and not as slaves or servants. Similarly, younger people must respect elders and try to fulfill their essential needs on priority compared to all other works at home. None should hurt others' self-respect or exploit others' emotions.

If someone makes a mistake, then in solitude he/she must be tenderly explained the harm the mistake has caused. To rebuke, curse or beat someone in front of others is totally wrong. It damages more than corrects. It creates ill-feelings, hatred and disenchantment which is a very shameful situation to arise in a worthy family. Everyone would realize his/her mistakes when told patiently with love. Instead, if one is insulted then he would become stubborn, try to take revenge out of anger, and create a lot of trouble.

It is wrong to take more for oneself surreptitiously. Carrying out undesirable activities like eating tasty food items in the market without others' knowledge, secretly amassing money for oneself, spending more money on self-entertainment, personal desires and fashion, etc is inviting jealousy, ill-will, hatred and reproach of the household.

If someone has to dress up well to go out to work then others must understand that it is a necessity and not indulgence in fashion. If someone has to eat special food because he has to work hard the whole day, then all must understand that this is for his sustenance

and not for any undue favor or to satisfy his greed of tongue. It is easy to distinguish between whether a special life style is adopted for necessity or for indulgence. A person cannot hide his feelings completely. Indulgence in taste and showoff gets reflected in his each and every action. While if someone genuinely needs something special then it would be tied to some special situation, while all the other time his lifestyle and actions would be no different from the family's standard. In any case, whenever one needs special conveniences, it should be in the knowledge of every one in the family.

Strives in Joint Families

Whenever a spark of strife gets kindled in a family, the environment of that home becomes very unpleasant, bitter and unlivable. Most commonly this happens because expected respect and courtesy was not shown by one towards the other. Strives are not so much due to loss or gain in financial matters. They are mostly due to lack of courtesy, respect and gentleness in one's behavior. Every member in the family has a right to be treated with respect, and it is very inappropriate to deny him/her that right. Whoever treats others egoistically, with disrespect, arrogance and contempt, should be patiently and gently made to realize the impropriety of his/her behavior. We must also try to find out the reasons behind the lack of understanding and love, and sort them out at the earliest.

Splits and partitions of joint families over minor differences of opinions should discourage. As far as possible it is good to keep together the structure of joint families. Living in a joint family helps in much better development of self, as compared to living in nuclear families. However, if alienation and disaffection among family members is not reducing, strives at home are not subsiding despite

earnest efforts, and if it appears that living in different homes would be the only solution to attain peace, then it is good to do so with due love and trust.

Importance of Rightful Earning

It is important to speak humbly with all, to be happy and make others happy too. But it is even more important that we earn our living through hard work and honesty. Money earned through improper means pollutes and corrupts everyone's mind and intellect, and these faults then reveal themselves in the form of bad qualities in individuals, and result in strifes and ill-feelings among family members. Food earned through moral means gets transformed into '*sātwic* blood' which by itself provides for ample mental and physical healthiness and nurturing of virtuous qualities in individuals. Such food intensifies good qualities and good-will towards others further and further without much effort.

Epilogue

A *Gṛahastha Yogi* must try to make his home a zone of his service for the well being and progress of all family members. He must render his household duties seeing a perfect reflection of the Almighty in his family members and he must try to adorn them with the qualities of internal and external purity. One who constantly tries to nurture the tendency of serving others and cultivate generosity, his inner being gets sanctified like any other *sādhak* of yoga. A *Gṛahastha Yogi* attains the same state of perfection and bliss as any other yogi. *Gṛahastha āshram* is a perfect way of life. If all duties of *gṛahastha* are faithfully and sincerely fulfilled then one can attain every spiritual accomplishment that is possible in this life and beyond. *Gṛahastha Yoga* is a well experienced and well-followed path among all the forms of yoga.